DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 415 PS 021 832

AUTHOR Brostrom, Stig; And Others
TITLE Quality of the Child's Life in Nordic Day Care Centers: A Nordic Co-Operative Project.
PUB DATE 7 Sep 93
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; *Cultural Influences; *Day Care Centers; *Day Care Effects; Early Childhood Education; Foreign Countries; *Influences; *Quality of Life
IDENTIFIERS Denmark; Finland; *Nordic Countries; Program Characteristics; Sweden

ABSTRACT

An ongoing research project has been designed to study the factors that constitute quality in children's life in Danish, Swedish, and Finish day care centers. Each national group will present a number of transcripts of observations, and will then make an analysis of the observations made by the other groups. Thus, the different frames of reference due to national variations in day care practice will be used to find similarities and differences. Through observations of Danish, Swedish, and Finish children, and interviews with the children and teachers, the project will analyze the quality of children's every day lives in the day care center in order to determine the characteristics of care, upbringing, and education that promote quality in children's lives. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Quality of the Child's Life in Nordic Day Care Centers

A Nordic co-operative project

ED 366 415

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Stig Broström
Royal Danish School of Educational Studies, Denmark
Maritta Hännikäinen
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Marjanna Berg-de Jong
University of Lund, Malmö School of Education, Sweden
Lena Rubinstein-Reich
University of Lund, Malmö School of Education, Sweden
Sven Thyssen
Danish National Institute for Educational Research, Denmark

Summary: The paper presents a description of an ongoing project, the purpose of which is to study the factors that constitute quality in childrens' life in Nordic day care centers. An important reason for this co-operative project is the discussion about the special "Nordic care model" that arouses interest in other parts of Europe and in the USA. The main aim of the project is to analyse the quality of children's every day lives in the day care center in order to determine the characteristics of care, upbringing and education to promote quality in children's lives. The project team, however, views quality not only as a practical or didactical, but also as a theoretical and methodological problem. What characterizes quality? How these characteristics can be studied? Does the day care center provide children a good life?

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Stig Broström
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 021832

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Quality of the Child's Life in Nordic Day Care Centers

A Nordic co-operative project

Stig Broström
Royal Danish School of Educational Studies, Denmark
Maritta Hännikäinen
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Marjanna Berg-de Jong
University of Lund, Malmö School of Education, Sweden
Lena Rubinstein-Reich
University of Lund, Malmö School of Education, Sweden
Sven Thyssen
Danish National Institute for Educational Research, Denmark

In recent years the educational quality in connection with day care centers and other institutions for small children has been increasingly discussed in many European contries as well as in USA. In this discussion attention is often turned to the Nordic countries. The special "Nordic model" arouses great interest in the other parts of Europe and in USA.

There is therefore reason to take a closer look at what quality is in Nordic day care centers (Denmark: børnehave, Sweden: daghem, Finland: päiväkoti) and what is its "central core".

The project intendeds to extend and deepen to the international and Nordic discussion about quality by producing a research-based description of children's lives in day care centers in the Nordic contries. The project is seen as a contribution to the international research co-operation, the practical perspective of which is to provide for a better quality in upbringing, education and care for small children.

The purpose of the project

The purpose of the project is to analyse the quality of children's lives in the day care center. The project is an educational psychological project aimed at giving a better understanding of the *concept of quality* in this particular connection. In other words, we are not aiming at a *survey* of the quality of the children's lives in day care centers in the

three countries. Instead we wish to make use of more detailed observations of the lives of a small number of children in a number of centers, in order to get a deeper understanding of and knowledge about what quality is in this sense.

The purpose of the project is both to find concrete descriptions of good quality and a better theoretical understanding of quality. Here differences between children's lives in the Nordic countries may be of significance and point out important and maybe overlooked aspects in the discussion about quality. Basically the same day care tradition prevails in the Nordic countries. There is, however, reason to believe that there are also some differences which may be essential to be considered in a project like this. It may help us achieve a better understanding of what is the central core in quality.

A further aim is to point out possible problematic sides of our present day care practice. Is for example something important overlooked or neglected in the care and education of the children?

It should be stressed that we intend to study the quality of the child's life and what constitutes a life of good quality. Better knowledge of this will contribute to the discussion of what quality in care and education is, and we will draw conclusions about how to develop quality in care and education. This may in its turn have an impact on pre-school and teacher education.

Finally, the project team also wishes to generate new methodological approaches in studying children in natural settings by constructing and using a variety of research and description methods.

Earlier research on quality in day care

Research on the quality of day care in itself is not a new topic. It is, in fact, a classic theme in research on early childhood education. It concerns, however, quality of education, and thus only indirectly quality of the child's life. In this research various factors have served as indicators of quality, such as quantitative factors (e.g. the size of child groups or the ratio between children and staff), financial and material aspects (e.g. the standard of equipment), quality of staff (e.g. level of teacher training) or curricular or didactic arrangements. For instance a Swedish study showed, that the staff's agreement concerning the educational goals were more crucial for the quality than the number of educators (9). Furthermore both studies from Bermuda and from Pennsylvania have

showed a relation between the leader's experience and the children's development of social competence (20, 10). Finally there is a growing interest in creating and using rating scales in order to measure the educational quality (7). See for an overview of the research on quality in day care e.g. Kärrby (11) and Phillips (19).

A large scale Nordic study - the so-called BASUN-project - has observed 126 five-year-old children in their homes and day care centers in order to describe modern childhood in the Nordic countries (13). The children's and the parents ways of acting are described as well as some typical patterns of the activity of the children and the educators in the daycare centers. Among other things the project shows that what attracts the child to the daycare is the possibility to "be a child among other children in the group", and "the enthusiasm the child shows is related to the opportunity to play with other children" (p. 69).

The present project, instead, takes quality as a theoretical and methodological problem. What is essential in a life of good quality? Does the day care center provide the child a life of good quality? Do we provide what the child needs from the child's point of view? Does this correspond to the concept of quality, which the day care practice is based upon?

Theoretical background

The project is based on a synthesis of knowledge from various research traditions.

Thus, we know that a stimulating environment is of significance to the child's psychical development. See for instance Piaget (21 and 22) and Bruner (2 and 3).

We also know that care which is founded on understanding of the child's activity and which also appreciates and respects the child is significant to how lively and actively the child explores and constructs his/her world. See Spitz (23), Bowlby (1), Diderichsen and others (5 and 6), Lisina (15) and Thyssen (24).

Finally, we know that the child's own activity is essential to his/her development. It is through the child's activity that he/she gains knowledge and an understanding of the world and develops his/her relations to other people. See for instance Davydov (4), Vygotskij (25), Leontjev (14) and Elkonin (8).

Quality is about whether something is good or bad. Which are the essential characteristics of the good life in the day care center? We assume that a fundamental point in the

quality of the child's life is the character of his/her commitment and creativity expressed in play, exploration and construction of his/her world together with other children and with attentive adults. Here we want to refer to Ferre Laevers' concept of *involvement* (see 12).

Our approach is based upon the following more general assumptions:

1. A theory about quality of life must be built upon an understanding of what is essential in life. Essential is that the human being creates and changes his/her world and culture and thereby him/herself - together with other individuals.
2. At every moment of life an individual by his/her activity is contributing to the creation and ongoing re-creation of the world and himself/herself. The individual is a subject in this process.
3. Children create their own culture. Here an important element is play. Between 5 and 7 years of age new values are emerging in their common lifespace out of their activity. The children become attracted to new features in the world, they share with adults: knowledge and concepts - and begin to feel attracted to school life.

In each situation life quality then is related to whether the individual is a *subject* and an active agent in the social life processes he/she is a part of and thereby in his/her own development - or whether he/she is an *object* in life processes which are determined by the others.

These general considerations should help us to keep an openness in the research. They need, however, some elaboration so that they may function as a tool for observation. We shall look into that below.

Method

The comparative set-up contains an important methodological aspect. Each national group will present a number of transscripts of observations. Each group will then make an analysis of the observations made by the other groups on the basis of this description. This way, the different frames of reference due to national variations in day care practice will be used to find similarities and differences. This is also a way to practice the method of triangulation: *data triangulation* where different methods of documentation and analysis are used to analyse and interpret the same case material; and *researcher triangulation*

where different researchers analyse and make interpretations of a phenomenon independently of one another and from different positions and perspectives. Comparisons are made of differences and similarities in the interpretations and analyses. (16, p. 45). This method is successfully being used in the international comparative research project IMEN (International Mother tongue Education Network), see e.g. Kalle, a reader's portrait (17).

In the project we will use both observations and interviews.

Observations

The so-called method of open observation will be used, where the theme which is to be observed and the type of incidents/phenomena, where the theme shows itself, are determined in advance. The observations are made in order to get more knowledge about the theme, e.g. how it appears, in what different ways and under what conditions.

In this study the observations will focus on what happens during the time the child spends in day care, especially on such aspects as

- Whether the child acts as and is treated as a subject,
- The activity of the child in forming its world together with the others, both staff and children.

Concrete manifestations of quality from the child's point of view may be:

- Activity, e.g. committedness, liveliness, absorbedness, fascination, involvement
- Way of being, e.g. happiness, friendliness, kindness, obligingness, openness to other people.

The method of following a single child during each observation period (individual child tracking) will be applied.

Interviews

Interviews will be made both with teachers and children, where the themes of the observations will be discussed. The interviews will elucidate the conceptions of both teachers and children of what happened during the observation period, especially focusing

on evaluative aspects of quality. How did the child percieve his/her own actions, and the actions of the teacher towards him? How does the child perceive his own situation? What are the teachers' thoughts about how to stimulate the child and the group, what strategies are chosen? Interviews and observations will also be used to provide a background description of the setting (cf. Pascal and Bertram, quality dimensions (18)).

Problems that we are dealing with presently after making pilot observations, are e.g.

- the need of training in using the open observation method
- difficulties in understanding each others language and making translations, especially from Finnish to English, and the loss of information that goes with it
- differences in ways of making interpretations. However, such differences also are of use in that they can serve as validation.

Plan of investigation

Ten Danish, ten Swedish and five Finnish children will be observed in their day care centers. Each child will be observed for two hours at least three times during the study.

We will choose centers which are considered to be of good quality in a traditional sense. We will avoid centers which are in some way special when compared to the common tradition in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Thus, various "alternative" or experimental settings will be excluded. The children to be observed will be "normal", well-functioning children, half boys and half girls.

The observations will be carried out in four day care centers in Denmark and in Sweden and in two day care centers in Finland. For every group where children are observed the principal of the day care center and one of the other kindergarten teachers attached to the group will be interviewed jointly. Also the children that are observed, will be, as far as possible, interviewed.

Thus the steps in our study are as follows:

1. Observations.
2. Interviews about the observations and the setting.
3. Analysis and interpretation of the child's life in an educational and caring context.
4. Clarification of central aspects of quality and general educational and caring dimensions.

5. Illustration of the central aspects and the educational and caring dimensions by means of examples from the observations.

An example

Following will be given an example of description of observations. The basis for the description is a video of five-year-old children in a day care center. Two situations will be described. After the each description follows a comment:

Situation 1:

Seven children, all boys, are sitting 'round a table, painting milk cartons. Sitting with them is the female educator, Susan. A male educator, Phil, walks around and sorts out different things. He helps the children, talks with them, and puts away the houses they are making, for them.

The milk cartons the children are painting, are going to be houses in a town they are in the process of making. The houses will be standing on a piece of paper with "roads". All in all it will take up a couple of square metres when it is finished.

It is all taking place in a very nice atmosphere. Susan sings a little to the children whilst they paint - sometimes the children join in. In between she talks with them.

The children share the colours. Pass them to each other.

All the time the children are sitting painting and they are engrossed in it, at the same time as they talk or join in the singing.

"Eric, why are you painting a small one?"

Eric: "Just because I am."

Another boy says jokingly and at the same time pulling a face: "Because he's not called Phil."

Phil: "I think yours is going to be a fruit and vegetable stall, Jacob. There are stripes on one of the sides. It looks like a fruit stall." He says it in a friendly voice. With a smile and at the same time a bit of a humorous tone of voice.

Susan: "I think it is a good idea that we get a fruit stall in that town."

Phil: " Jacob's fruit stall."

Jacob is excited.

Susan: "I think Eric is making a sweetshop. Or a flowershop."

Phil laughs.

Eric: "No, it is a flowershop where you can get sweets."

Another boy jokingly: "Yes, if you are very nice."

Another one: "If you are nice you can buy sweets."

"This is a courthouse."

Phil: "I thought it was a coal shop."

A boy: "I thought it was an allotment house."

Susan starts on another song. The tune is well-known, but some new words are being improvised. The children sing about Zorro, whom they know about from films on tv.

A heated discussion starts amongst the boys: has Zorro got a foil or a sword?

"He hasn't got a sword."

"Yes, he has."

"He has a foil."

"He's only got a foil."

"Then why did you say he has a sword?"

"He hasn't got a revolver either, because a revolver and a gun is the same thing.", a boy says, excitedly.

Phil, about a foil: "It is a weapon like a sword, but it is thinner and more frail."

Susan talks to the children about what a sword and a foil is, but then she asks Phil, who explains that the difference is that a foil is a pointed weapon and a sword is a slashing weapon.

The children are very excited about this discussion.

Comments:

1. The children's activity is part of a more comprehensive project: making a town. They are engrossed in what they are doing - for instance, a fruit stall - and working conscientiously with it and at the same time they participate in a conversation or a song.

2. The educator listen to the children, hear what they have to say, ask questions and give the child the chance to talk about something, which the educator assumes the child is interested in talking about. Furthermore, the educator is trying to create a friendly atmosphere: talks nicely to the children, sings with them in a nice way. Furthermore, the educators do their best to give the children knowledge where the children begin to ask questions and where the educators assume the children are curious and may be inspired.

3. The children's interests are at one time factual: whether Zorro has a foil or a sword, how to grow tomatoes etc.

4. At the same time their interests are aimed towards a metaphorical world, which contains real, as well as fantasy elements - a kind of ideal, human world, akin to fairy tales, film, literature. This metaphorical world is full of interesting phenomena and the human being is a person who accomplishes things and is therefore worthy of respect. Children here orientate themselves toward common experiences, for instance Zorro, which fascinate them. Even though Zorro is a well-known figure and even though they discuss Zorro factually, the children still, in a way, create this figure themselves. In that the children turn to and together occupy themselves with Zorro, this figure comes alive to them as an element in a common fantasy world where Zorro represents, and to some extent, concretisize the children's ideas of an exciting life. In this sense the children create their own world. This dimension becomes particularly obvious in the children's playing. For instance where the children play big and small whales (see below).

5. There is reason to consider whether such (metaphorical) themes, which the children develop together (Zorro and the big and small whales), are part of the children's development of their own personal commitment to the concrete world of reality? Are themes like these, in other words, connected to existential questions for the children in the developmental period they are in? If that is so, they are of importance for the quality of the children's lives. Under all circumstances, the children seem to enjoy being together around such themes. They react to each other's comments and actions.

They orientate themselves towards common goals. They create a togetherness which is strengthened by their endeavours to find a common meaning: How is Zorro to be understood? What is it he does?

6. In any case, it is noticeable that the metaphorical world in a concentrated form contains elements which seem to be essential to the children: to be competent and to enjoy respect from other people. It looks as if the children act as personalities.

7. The whole situation is marked by a friendly atmosphere. Both amongst the educator and the child, and amongst the children themselves.

8. Frequently the children make fun and jokes. Humour seems to play an important part in their interchange. They pull funny faces, say joking things like: "Because I'm not called Phil" and "If you're nice you may buy sweets." The educator, Phil, also uses a bit of a humorous tone when talking to the children.

Situation 2:

Six boys, 5 year olds are playing in a small room with matresses and pillows and "rib stalls".

They jump around, climb the "rib stalls" while discussing and negotiating at the same time about what roles they want to take. First they want to be monkeys and they discuss who is going to be the biggest. The discussion changes and someone wants to be a blue-whale. Everybody gets down on the floor, crawling around like animals in the sea and at the same time telling what kind of animal they are:

"I also want to be a blue whale".

One of the boys announces that not everybody can be a blue-whale and a discussion follows about what kind of animals and what size they want to be:

"I am a small blue whale".

"I am a dolphin".

"I am a dolphin too".

The boys are crawling around on the floor. One of the boys tries to extend the play by suggesting that they are going to be guards.

Boy 1: "We are your guards/friends".

Boy 2: "You are guarding us".

Boy 1: "You are!".

Boy 2: "You are our guards, we are not guards for you".

Boy 1: "Then I don't feel like taking part".

Boy 2: "Don't!".

....

Five of the boys are lying on the mattress, looking at one boy still crawling on the floor. One of them asks:

"Are you a blue-whale?".

"No, I am a dolphin".

"Are you a small or a big one?".

"Big".

"Small".

"Big".

"You have to be a small one since we all are small!".

"But finally I will become a grown-up".

....

They all decide to take their sweaters off.

Then they decide to build a hideaway.

The whole group is busy trying to put a very large mattress on top of a couple of pillows. One boy, in a friendly voice about another one present, who is younger and who has not been playing with these boys before: "He is actually very nice because he is helping."

Another boy, also friendly: "If he is with us he has to help."

Three boys on each side hold the mattress. One of them wants to jump first and says then that only two on each side have to hold the mattress. This one jumps first and the others follow.

Comments:

1. The athmosphere in this situation is very friendly. Even when there is disagreement among the boys it is verbally solved like when deciding who is going to be a guard. One of the boys cannot accept the non-reciprocity and clearly states this. He is not excluded from the play but instead the theme is dropped.

2. While seemingly only running around and jumping the boys at the same time create a common project and negotiate roles. They try to adjust their roles in order to fit into the structure. The relation between the boys is characterized by respect for one another. Nobody is excluded. Although one of the boys is a leader he is not the only one who decides but all the boys seem to actively take part in creating and negotiating the project.

3. The play themes during the session change but they are all the time a joint creation of the children themselves. During the whole play session a lot of discussion about who is big and who is small is taking place. What purpose serves this discussion for the boys?

4. In this situation the teachers are not present at all. At one point a boy closes the door to the room very firmly, saying "You stupid door!". This can be seen as a way of clearly marking that the play needs a protected space against the adults.

Literature

1. Bowlby, J.: Developmental Psychiatry Comes of Age. American Journal of Psychiatry, 1988, 145(1), 1-10.

2. Bruner, J.S., Olver, R.R. & Greenfield, P.M.: Studies in Cognitive Growth. New York: Wiley, 1966.

3. Bruner, J.S.: Towards a theory of instruction. Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1966.

4. Davydov, V.V.: Udviklende undervisning (*Developmental education*). Copenhagen: Sputnik, 1989.

5. Diderichsen, A. & Thyssen, S.: Omsorg og udvikling (*Care and development*). Copenhagen: Danmarks Pædagogiske Institut, 1991.10.

6. Diderichsen, A., Enggaard, J., Hansen, V.R., Sørensen, B. & Thyssen, S.: Fra skolestartens værksteder (*From the workshops of the school beginning*). Copenhagen: Danmarks Pædagogiske Institut, 1989.52.

7. Ekholm, B. & Hedin, A.: Vanans makt eller makt över vanan? (*The force of habit or the force over habit?*). Linköping Universitet, 1990.

8. Elkonin, D.: Legens psykologi (*Psychology of play*). Copenhagen: Sputnik, 1988.

9. Hägglund, S. & Palmérus, K.: Hur många vuxna behövs på dagis? (*How many adults in kindergarten?*). Pedagogiska Institutionen, Göteborgs Universitet, 1987.

10. Kontos, S. & Feine, R.: Child, care and Quality, compliance with regulations and children's development (*"The Pennsylvania Study"*). Quality in child care. NAEYC, 1987.

11. Kärrby, G.: Kvalitet i pedagogiskt arbete med barn (*Quality in pedagogical work with children*). Stockholm: Allmenna Förlaget, 1992.

12. Laevers, F.: The innovative project EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION and the definition of quality in education. Leuven: Department and Educational Sciences of the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven, 1992.

13. Langsted, O. & Haavind, H.: Daycare and family: The every day life of children in Scandinavia. In: Report from the conference: Parental employment and caring for children. Policies and services in EC and Nordic Countries. The ministry of Social Affairs. Copenhagen, 1993.

14. Leontjev, A.N.: Virksomhed, bevidsthed, personlighed (*Activity, consciousness, personality*). Copenhagen: Sputnik, 1983.

15. Lisina, M.: Kommunikation og psykisk udvikling fra fødslen til skolealderen (*Communication and psychic development from birth until the school age*). Copenhagen: Sputnik, 1989.

16. Malmgren, Lars-Göran; Nilsson, Jan & van de Ven, Piet Hein: Valet på ISIS. Rapport 1 från projektet Litteraturläsning på mellanstadiet. Pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete vid Lunds universitet nr. 92:181. Lund: Utvärderingsenheten, Lunds universitet, 1992.

17. Malmgren, Lars-Göran & van de Ven, Piet Hein: Kalle. A reader's portrait. A speculative analysis within the IMEN research project Reading literature in comprehensive school (age 11-13). Occasional Papers in Mother Tongue Education 4. Enschede, The Netherlands: International Mother Tongue Education Network, 1990.

18. Pascal, C. & Bertram, T.: Defining and assessing Quality in the education of children from 4-7 years. Paper presented at First European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education. Leaven (Belgium), 25-27th September 1991.

19. Phillips, D.A. (ed.): Quality in child care. What does research tell us? Research Monographs of the NAEYC, Washington D.C., 1987.

20. Phillips, D.A. et al.: Dimensions and effects of child care quality ("The Bermuda Study"). Quality in child care. NAEYC, 1987.

21. Piaget, J.: The Child's Conception of the World. New York: Hartcourt & Brace, 1929.

22. Piaget, J.: Psykologi og pædagogik (*Psychology and education*). Copenhagen: Reitzels Forlag, 1973.

23. Spitz, R.A.: Hospitalism. An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood. In Freud, A. (ed.): The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child. New York: International University Press, 1945.

24. Thyssen, S.: Omsorg for de 2-6 årige. 1. Omsorg i udviklingsmæssigt perspektiv (*Care for children aged 2-6 years old. 1. Care in a developmental perspective*). Copenhagen: Danmarks Pædagogiske Institut, 1991.66.

25. Vygotskij, L.S. and others: Om barnets psykiske udvikling (*Regarding the child's psychological development*). Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1982.